

Laughter in Russo-Japanese Relations: Comic Pictures of The Russo-Japanese War

Yulia Mikhailova

It may be argued that the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905 was the key event which shaped relations between the two countries for the next several decades. Defeat in war brought for Russia a bitter sense of humiliation, more so because this was the defeat of the country proud of its past military achievements. In addition, the war was lost to an Asian nation looked down upon by the Russians. Defeat and humiliation called for revenge which was only partly satisfied by difficult victories in military clashes at Cheng-ku fen (1938) and Nomonkhan (1939) and, hence, became an important psychological foundation for the Soviet takeover of the Kurile Islands in 1945.¹⁾ The apprehension of new areas of humiliation may still be felt in the attempt to resolve the dispute on the so-called “Northern Territories problem.”

Japan’s victory over Russia was of paramount importance for the nation-building of a young modern state and its relations with Western powers.²⁾ It also created an impression that Russia could become easy booty in the future — a supposition which gave psychologic support to the “Siberian expedition” (1918–22), numerous border clashes in the second half of the 1930s and which may still reverberate in the minds of contemporary politicians or academics.

Literature and academic research on the topic of the Russo-Japanese War are voluminous. However, as the centenary of the war draws near, scholars search for new approaches to understand this multifarious event. As demonstrated by the book edited by Sandra Wilson and David Wells, it is the social, cultural, intellectual and imaginative rather than the military or political aspects of the war that are of major interest now.³⁾ The post-modernist paradigm also have opened new frontiers for research. The study of general patterns of historical development, the thought of the intellectual elite or the exploits of politicians has been replaced by attention to mentality, psychology, behaviour or aspirations of more ordinary people. Many new historical sources have also been brought into the orbit of research.

This article is based on various comic pictures that appeared in Japan, Russia and Europe during the war of 1904–1905 and have not yet been used for research purposes. Among them are lithographs, pictures in satirical magazines, newspaper cartoons, post-cards and even designs of cigarette packs. These materials do not only give us the opportunity to understand how the Japanese and Russians looked at each other during the war, the images of enemy and self, but they also provide us with insights into psychological phenomena not directly related to the war itself. For example, satirical

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prints produced simultaneously in Japan and in Russia as a reaction to the same event may be instrumental for understanding, in a comparative perspective, the comic spirit of the Russians and the Japanese, and the resulting humor, satire and laughter. Understanding humor and its stimuli, and comprehending the gist of jokes are difficult aspects of intercultural communication. For their proper understanding we need to know the social context of jokes and the cultural code to which they are related; we need also to grasp the subtleties of a foreign language. This article attempts to examine what seemed ludicrous to the Japanese about Russians and vice versa during the year of military confrontation. What was thought to bring two peoples into a mirthful state of mind? What role in each society did laughter play? It is argued that intrinsic notions of the comic have deep roots in culture, whereas exterior forms of its expression and social functions of the comic are determined by the social and political context.

The investigation of comic pictures and stories of the Russo-Japanese War will also contribute to research on the comic spirit in modern Japan.⁴⁾ In his recent book on modern Japanese fiction, J. Cohn noted that the comic literary forms of the Edo period, *gesaku* in particular, did not well suit the lofty national mission held by Japan in Meiji Period. The realisation of modernization program required seriousness,⁵⁾ so that comic forms of literature were replaced by *watakushi shosetsu* and, it may be added, by political novels, which left no space for the comic spirit. However, it will be demonstrated that some comic forms borrowed from the Edo literary tradition were also used for the achievement of those “great national goals,” in particular, in mobilizing Japanese society for victory over Russia.

Another goal of this article is to cast more light on the reaction of Russian society towards the war with Japan. The emphasis of Soviet historiography on class struggle and revolutionary movements inevitably resulted in an examination of graphic forms that were related to revolutionary events, in this case to the revolution of 1905–1907.⁶⁾ Recently, however, in the atmosphere of criticism of the Soviet past, another tendency — to investigate everything, forbidden or muted before — has developed in Russia. As regards to the Russo-Japanese War, many diaries or reminiscences have been published, and new interpretations of events and personalities have appeared.⁷⁾ Mass culture of the time, represented, for example, by post-cards, also received attention.⁸⁾ However, an objective study on the perception of the Russo-Japanese War by its contemporaries is still lacking.

How the Russians Ridiculed the Enemy

The attitude of the Russians towards Japan at the beginning of the 20th century was not much different from that of other European countries, and may be characterised as an *Orientalist* mode of vision. Japan was perceived simultaneously as exotic and strange, backward and passive, weak and feminine.⁹⁾ The logic of superiority and domination underpinned this vision.¹⁰⁾ Japan appeared to be funny and queer by mere definition, because it was different from the West. Thus, a Russian translation of a book by Douglas Sladen published in 1904 with the obvious purpose to enlighten the Russian public about Japan said: “In Japan everything is a farce, everything is queer”.¹¹⁾ The Russian political elite, including Tsar Nicholas II himself,¹²⁾ did not take Japan as a serious enemy, and did not give or even want to give sufficient attention to war

preparations. Reports from the Far East about Japanese attacks on land and sea did not receive serious consideration. Rivalries between the navy and the army and within each of them also hindered an objective analysis of the situation. This attitude towards the war was reflected in its ideological representations.

Soon after the war began (8 February 1904), Russian towns and villages were inundated with the so-called “popular prints” (*lubki*) representing the “events” of the war in a way that the Russians always assumed the upper hand or poked fun at the Japanese.¹³⁾ Though these prints were designed as propaganda tools, in order to be successful, propaganda must correspond to the thoughts and feelings of the people. Only then can propagated ideas turn into cultural cliché or stereotypes that pass from one generation to the next. Thus, it may be assumed that authors of “popular prints” well knew the expectations of the public and tailored their “art” to the public taste.

A typical Russian satirical “popular print” of the Russo-Japanese War had a rather fixed composition: a larger-than-life figure of a Russian Cossack or sailor in the centre or forefront, dwarfish figures of Japanese military men around and an “international trio” — Uncle Sam, John Bull and a Chinese or a Korean — looking on, amazed by the strength and might of the Russian. As a rule, the harbour at Port Arthur formed the background of a picture. Typical is a print *Let Us Sit by the Sea and Wait* [Posidim u morya, podozhdyom pogody] where a larger-than-life Russian *muzhik* holding a larger-than-life gun is represented sitting at the harbor at Port Arthurs (Figure 1). He is smiling ironically at the attempts of the Japanese and their Western allies to take over the Russian fortress. He is waiting calmly for reinforcements which, in fact, arrived in May of the next year (1905) only to be crushed at Battle of Tsushima Straits.

Scenes of the Russians poking fun at the Japanese were often put in the context of popular forms of entertainment, such as *raeshnik*, for example. *Raeshnik* was a genre of performing short comic rhymed stories accompanied by pictures shown through a “magic lantern,” a predecessor of the contemporary slide projector. These performances were an essential part of fairs and festivals and always attracted a large audience. One “popular print,” with a caption written in an unsophisticated *lubok* style and framed with cheap-looking vignettes, represents a Japanese who had lost a card game to a Russian sailor (Figure 2). The sailor punishes his adversary by beating his nose with cards until it swells and begins to bleed.

The “popular prints” often represented a huge and smart Russian making some bodily harm on a Japanese who, was portrayed as small and ugly. Many prints depicted the injured, beaten, cringed, frail and puny bodies of Admiral Togo, Marquis Ito or General Nogi. Their bodily weakness and ineptitude were always emphasised, their physical height, skin colour and facial features were ridiculed.

It should not be taken for granted, however, that large bodily size necessarily bears a positive connotation in the Russian mind. Many Russian proverbs give evidence to the contrary: “Little bodies may have great souls,” “Big Fedul, but a fool,” “Small fellow — bold fellow.” “The mountain gave birth to a mouse,” says a Russian proverb, analogous to English “efforts of giants may be useless.” This duality of attitudes and perceptions is characteristic to many contemporary representations of the Japanese in the Russian mass media. For example, on the occasion of the meetings between Hashimoto Ryutaro and Boris Yeltsin in 1998–1999, Russian newspapers published

photos where tall and stout Russian President firmly hugged the tiny figure of the Japanese Prime-Minister. These photographs could definitely provoke ironic smiles among the Russians. However, the article which accompanied the photo made fun of the shortcomings of Yeltsin's policy.

The primitive patriotism of the "popular prints" was supplemented with more sophisticated cartoons in satirical magazines such as *Budilnik*¹⁴⁾ and *Strekoza*¹⁵⁾ which were read mainly by people in the city. International events always figured among the topics raised by the editors and authors of *Budilnik*. Many pictures were of rather high quality, and included intelligent and witty jokes. At the same time, artists shared most of the ideas of the time spread among the public. Thus, they were not free of the racism which dominated Western attitudes toward non-western peoples and made use of racial prejudices, for example, depicting Japanese military leaders as "silly hairy apes," "self-complacent frogs" or "yellow male-dogs." One cartoon, for example, represented a European woman washing a yellow dog in a tub (Figure 3). The caption to the picture notes: "You cannot wash the yellow male-dog and make him into a white one." This is an equivalent to the English proverb "the leopard cannot change its spots," but the Russian word for the "male-dog" (*kobel*) has strong abusive connotations.¹⁶⁾ It refers to a lustful person who cannot hold in check his desires and points here to the aggressive nature of Japan. Russia also wanted to see itself as the guard protecting Europe from the "yellow peril" as was thought to have happened during the Mongol invasion of the 13th century. Japan was thus often depicted as a monster with big claws rushing on Europe.

The geisha was one of the most popular icons which symbolised Japan in the mind of Western men. This image could have positive connotations of an artistic or picturesque Japan. It could also mean Japan-the-feminine, a weak country which needed the guidance of the West. Still other interpretations existed. Many Europeans perceived geisha as a frivolous woman. It was associated with stupid operettas, cheap souvenirs, bad taste and immorality. Obscenity was only step away from these sexual undertones. And the obscenity of the pornographic figures among the important sources of laughter. No wonder that the magazine *Strekoza* with its short humorous stories, anecdotes and cartoons poking fun at drunk merchants, infidel husbands and women in search of profitable marriages, quickly picked up the image of the geisha. For example, one story ridiculed Japan calling a waltz from a popular operetta *Geisha* "the Japanese national anthem" and reiterated how some Germans danced this waltz "to celebrate achievements of the small Eastern land."¹⁷⁾ The Russians attributed to geisha, and thereby to Japan as a whole, a deceitful and cheating nature, contrasting her to honest, but simple European men. This implied criticism of the fact that Japan had started the war without making a formal declaration. One comic story in pictures published in *Strekoza* ridiculed a Mr. Dum-dum (or a thick-in-thinking person) who sought the hand of a charming geisha Sea Star. He tried in vain to please her with various flowers, only to have a flower-pot thrown at his head.¹⁸⁾ In a figurative way, the story poked fun at the Anglo-Japanese Alliance and warned the English that next time they would be the ones to be deceived.

Japanese ambitions to strive for equality with the West were another favourite object of Russian jokes. A cartoon *Fantastic Dreams of Japan* portrayed a certain Horoshima Fukushimaovich Arisugawa and his friends as "international gentlemen" on their way to



Figure 1. Let Us Sit by the Sea and Wait

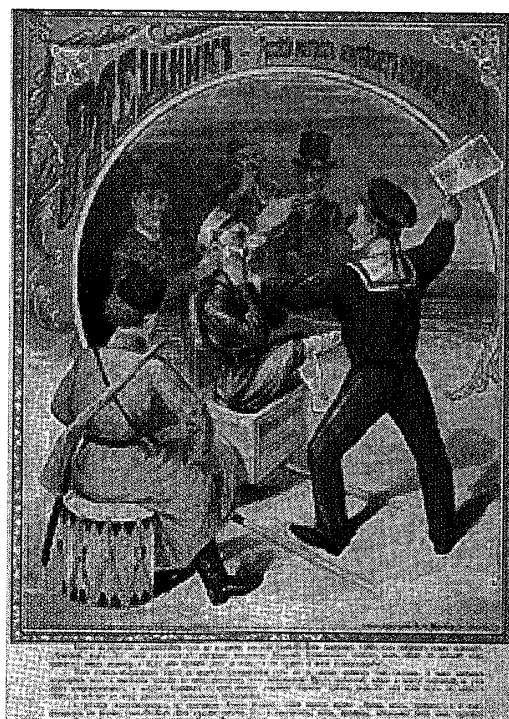


Figure 2. Russian Sailor Swindles a Japanese

conquer the hearts and bodies of European hetairas (Figure 4). “Horoshima” is a combination of the Japanese city name Hiroshima and the Russian word “khorosho” (good). “Fukushimovich” is a patronymic derived from the Japanese geographical name Fukushima. This unsophisticated combination of words created a comic effect. With cigar in mouth, monocle in eye and cuff-links from Tete — all attributes of European civilisation — Horoshima began his risky walk along the rope stretched over “the Niagara of life.” The caption says that he “dreams about conquering Vienna, Paris, Spain and Rome, but wakes up from the whip of a Russian bloke.” Japan’s dreams of world-wide rule by the Mongol race are forced to fade away.¹⁹⁾ However, in reality the surrender of Port Arthur and the dazzling Japanese victory at Tsushima would soon wake up Russia itself.

Information on the way the war was perceived in Russia and Europe may be gained through illustrated postcards which were an essential part of European life from the second half of the nineteenth century. In 1874 twenty two countries in Europe and Asia formed the International Post Union with the purpose to avoid additional taxation. Standardization (in size and price) of postcards as introduced. Postcards with inscriptions in three languages (German, French and Russian) could thus circulate free from one country to another. In Russia, the Community of Saint Evgeniya was especially active in the postcard business; it ordered postcards to be printed in Germany and France so that it was not always possible to know a postcard’s country of origin.

Naturally, important international events such as the Russo-Japanese War were depicted in postcards. Many of them illustrated battlescenes, battleships and cruisers, Russian commanders and soldiers. These pictures were often produced by well-known Russian artists: N. Samokish (who went to the war front), N. Verkhoturov, E. Lansere,

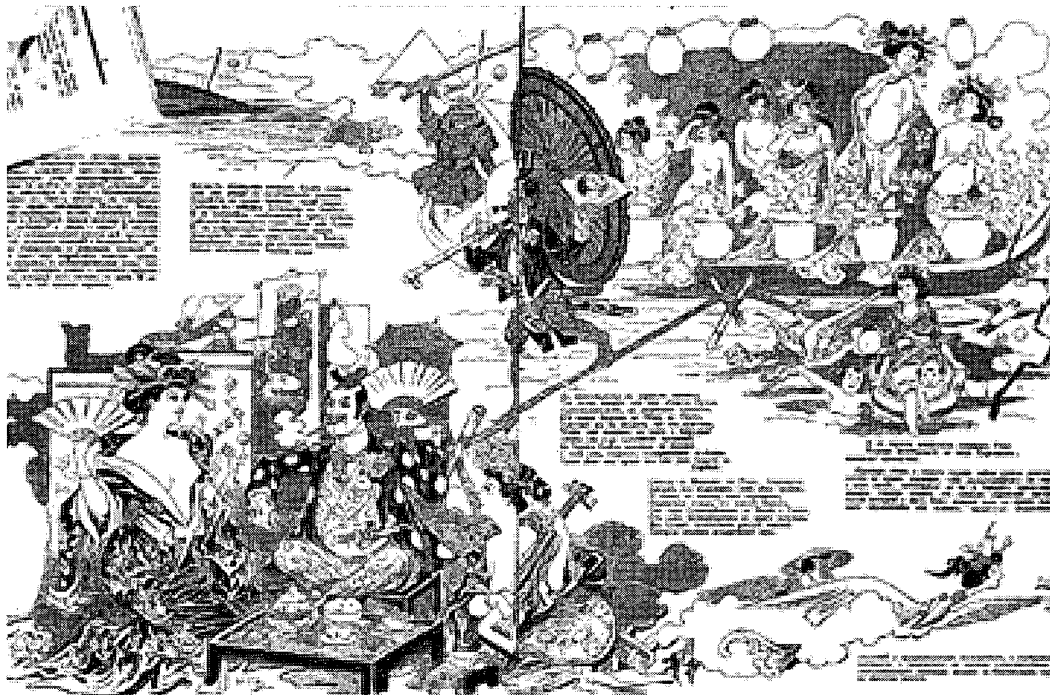


Figure 4. Fantastic Dreams of Japan

E. Bem and others. Satirical postcards also existed. For example, there was a *Russo-Japanese War* series of German postcards in which Russia was typically portrayed as a huge bear able to defeat Japan without even drawing swords. Japan as usual was represented as a geisha, and in some postcards shown exhausted by the war. France was depicted as sympathetic to Russia, while England favored Japan.

One of the most bold of these satirical postcards, bordering on obscenity, was called *The Music of General Oku* [La misiques du general Oku.]²⁰⁾ It represented Japanese soldiers ashore in Port Arthur blowing trumpets as if to notify the world of its victory. (Figure 5.) The point of joke here is that the faces of the Japanese are represented as thick pink buttocks with a trumpet plunged in between. The image of buttocks or buttocks with a trumpet has a long history in European literary and artistic traditions. Dante was probably the first to use it as a synonym for insolence.²¹⁾ Voltaire also created the image of a Goddess of Rumors who spread rumors and slander around the world through a trumpet in her bottom.²²⁾ Since the time of the French Revolution French cartoonists often portrayed their targets, be it a feudal lord or a revolutionary soldier, with a naked arse as a means of humiliation.²³⁾ The same image may be seen in European cartoons at the beginning of the Twentieth century. In 1901 a French cartoonist Jean Veber produced a famous cartoon *Impudent England* [L'impudique Albion] in which England was depicted as an old lady with a bare bottom.²⁴⁾ The smart, but vulgar representation of the Japanese soldiers in the postcard noted above may also have its roots in popular humor which often perceived the sounds produced by the human bottom as “music” and the bottom itself as a trumpet.

Through these satirical postcards we can see how mockery of the Japanese turned into criticism of Russian authorities who dragged the country into war, but were unable to win, thus bringing the country into disgrace. However, never did the cartoonists poke fun at the surrender of Port Arthur; the heroic, but tragic fate of its defenders left no space for jokes. On the contrary, the defeat of the Russian navy at Tsushima often became the target of sarcasm. One postcard represented Admiral Rozhdestvensky as a toy soldier with stiff face on board a papership, while the caption heaped scorn on his ill-considered strategy and readiness to surrender.²⁵⁾ Another postcard represented a stout lady in a décolleté ball dress (Figure 6). She was dancing on the bottom of the sea, obviously the Sea of Japan, with wrecked Russian ships all around. The postcard was decorated in a popular *moderne* style with Japanese chrysanthemums, Hokusai's wave and a nude female body — all tributes to



Figure 6. A Sea Dance.

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Orientalism. Contemporaries could read the message easily. On the infamous, for Russia, night of the Japanese attack on Port Arthur, navy and army officers, including the Governor-General of the Far East Alekseev and the Commander of the Port Arthur's squadron Stark, were in the midst of celebrating the name day of Stark's wife Maria with a ball. They were so enthusiastic with their celebrations that mistook the Japanese attack on the Russian navy for a congratulatory salute.

A series of ten postcards recounted in drawing and verse the whole story of the war, beginning with Russian intrigues in Korea and finishing with the Portsmouth Treaty. The first postcard claimed that the stupidity and rapacity of the so-called Bezobrazov clique²⁶⁾ had involved Russia into a risky enterprise with Korean timber. However, the only "results" of the so-called Russian "enlightenment policy" in Korea were the stumps in Korean forests. The Koreans, according to the story, did not like the stumps and pushed the Russians out. These postcards openly poked fun at high ranking Russian military men whose "business activity" was limited to organizing balls and parties in Port Arthur. Exhausted by their "business," they missed the Japanese attack on Chemulpo and took it for a "mere incident." Especially sarcastic was the criticism of Kuropatkin, the commander of the Russian army who was infamous for bringing to the front icons and candles instead of guns and shells, as if the Russian religious spirit was the best weapon against the Japanese. Kuropatkin was depicted galloping on horseback in front of the column of soldiers holding icons. "Patience, patience and patience!" is written on his banner. The unknown author of the postcards expressed strong indignation against generals and admirals who suppressed the will of soldiers to fight the enemy and only called for retreat. These postcards gave justice to the Japanese commanders and emphasised strongly that the Battle at Tsushima was the apotheosis of the Russian disgrace. However, the postcards hinted that although the navy was sunk, for some strange reason, the admirals escaped. According to the caption, the admirars literally "emerged dry out of the water." The Portsmouth Treaty could not save the honor of Russia, and Count Witte, who was so much praised by the Tsar for his efforts at the peace conference, was pejoratively called the Count-the-Half-of-Sakhalin (*Polusakhalinski*). The name of the poet and artist are unknown to us, but it is obvious that they belonged to the opposition if not to the revolutionary circle.

A separate postcard ridiculed Nicholas II, showing him in a humble dance before Count Witte as if thanking him for his negotiations at Portsmouth whereas a scull with inscription "Armée Russe" was standing nearby. It was not difficult to draw a conclusion that the real enemy at that moment was not the Japanese, but the Russian military and political leaders.

Magazine *Nipponchi* and the War

The first comic magazines with cartoons appeared in Japan during the late Tokugawa period and with the development of journalism and mass media in the Meiji period, cartoons became popular among the public. *Marumaru chinbun*, *Tobae*, *Kokkei shinbun* stand among the most famous illustrated satirical news magazines.²⁷⁾ The Russo-Japanese War gave rise to several new publications.²⁸⁾ One of them was the magazine *Nipponchi* founded in the autumn of 1904 as a temporary supplement to *Fūzoku Gahō*. From 1894 its editor-in-chief was Yamashita Shigetami (1857–1941), a

person who belonged to the second generation of Meiji intellectual elite. Shigetami graduated from the school for boys of samurai families attached to Dajokan and then worked nearly all his life at the Ministry of Finance. He was well versed in literature and for many years combined a career in government service with the work involved in publishing *Fūzoku Gahō*. It was Shigetami who suggested the idea to publish special thematic editions in addition to the regular issues (among 517 issues of the magazine 478 were regular).²⁹⁾ During the war with Russia three extra series, *Seirozukai* (Pictures of Attacks on Russia), *Gaitai zukai* (Pictures on the Triumphal Return) and *Nipponchi* (Comic Pictures of Japan), were published. Among them the *Nipponchi* was a comic magazine filled with humor and biting satire.

The title *Nipponchi* itself contains a pun. The middle syllable *pon* written in katakana may be put together with either the previous or following syllable producing respectively *Nippon* and *ponchi*. *Ponchi* was the term for cartoon widely used in Meiji Japan; it derived from the English word “punch.” However, *chi* for “land” used here might have acquired a special meaning in a magazine published during a war which sought to control Korean and Manchurian territories. The same sort of word play was widely used throughout the whole magazine.

The first issue of *Nipponchi* appeared on 7 September 1904, just five days after the Japanese victory at Liao-yang (*Ryōyō* in Japanese). The cartoon by Nakashima Shunkō, *Achievements of a House-wife, Sufferings of the Eagle* [Okusan-no otegara, washi-no kurushimi], celebrated this victory.³⁰⁾ The cartoon portrayed General Nogi as a housewife and General Kuroki and several Japanese soldiers strangling and plucking a huge eagle. The eagle definitely symbolises Russia as the double-headed eagle was



Figure 7. Achievements of a House-wife. Sufferings of the Eagle.
Nakashima Shunkō. Copyright: Yumani shobō 1997

part of the Russian coat of arms. This eagle resembles in its shape the Liaodung Peninsular and the eagle's beak represents the harbour at Port Arthur. Liaoyang is located to the north of the peninsula, thus the Russian defeat there made it impossible to come to the rescue of Port Arthur by land. As the Japanese beat the eagle, it tosses up Russian ships out of its beak. The main punch line lies in the words of General Kuroki: "I shall beat two wings, no, Liaoyang!" which in Japanese contains a pun: *ryōyoku* (two wings) sounds similar to *Ryōyō* (Liaoyang) (Figure 7).

Rabbles, Gogol and other writers have demonstrated that depiction of food may be instrumental in stimulating laughter and that people may be characterised by the food they eat. A story *War Time Dishes* [Sensō-no ryōri] advertised a menu of Russian food.³¹⁾ First comes a dish called *herazuguchitori*. This combination of three characters may be divided into *herazuguchi* (useless arguments) and *kuchitori* (side-dish), so that the whole expression acquires the meaning of "a side-dish of useless arguments." We see here eggs fried with canards, a pudding *kamaboko* which is coloured with rumors from the outside, but is empty inside, a *kinton*, something made of smashed potatoes with chestnuts and called *kuropatkin* (the name of the Russian General), and many other strange dishes. They are skilfully arranged on a tray to impress the Russian emperor, but their taste is as bad as the Russian army itself, so that one should not be misled by appearances. Thus, hints *Nipponchi*, no one should be dazzled by reports of the Russian military leaders about the achievements of the Russian army. The author widely resorted here to pun and travesty to create a comic effect.

In another dish, *Nikorasu-no mono*, *su* for vinegar stands as the last syllable in the name of the Russian Emperor — Nicholas — and at the same time as the first syllable in *su-no mono* or vinegary dishes. The marinades here consist of an arfish, abalone, vegetable *bofu* and cucumbers. But through the characters one guesses a second meaning: "[Though] the emperor's face is red, his efforts are no more than a bubble (*mizu-no awa*), he is in despair (*sitsubio*) and weak (*hebo*)".

The next dish is called *Mōyosenabe*. Here the first part of the word, *mōyose* conveys the meaning "that's enough." The second, *yosenabe*, is a chowder made of chicken, noodles, bread, vegetables or anything which suits one's taste. The Japanese usually eat it in winter. The second interpretation of the phrase is again hidden in characters: "Japanese soldiers take Harbin, the Russians raise the white flag, the Commander-in-Chief Alekseev is in trouble and his face looks pale; the Japanese can get as many war trophies as they like. However, it is becoming cold and we finish [the war] at this point." The last phrase, probably, hinted that the Japanese public was already tired of war.

We may also learn from *Nipponchi* that a new word *kanraku* meaning "surrender" or "to fall down" became quite popular among the Tokyo public during the war. People began to use the word *kanraku* when a drunk man fell down out of a jinrikisha or when his hat fell off his head.

Three cartoons (Figure 8) refer to the moment when in the end of October 1904 the Japanese took over 203 meters height which was of strategic importance in the siege of Port Arthur³²⁾ (although the cost of this success was 13,000 lives). It opened for the Japanese army an opportunity to fire straight down on Russian positions and both parties became quite close to each other. The Japanese were so happy that the expression *nihyakusan kōchi* (203 meters height) became a popular name for a woman's

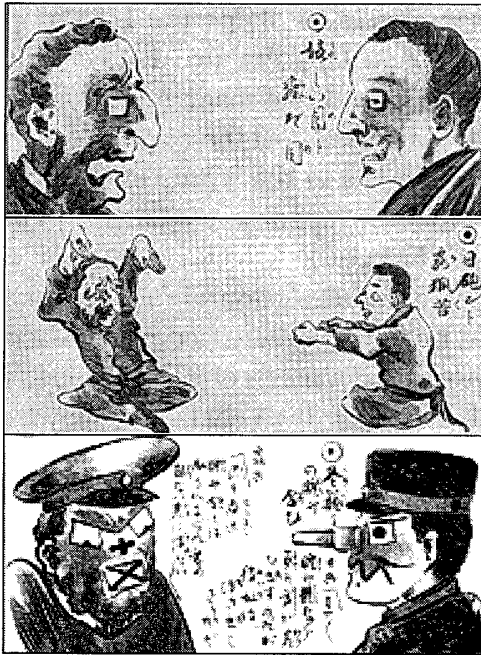


Figure 8. Staring Match and Tossing Game. Nakashima Shunkō. Copyright: Yumani shobō 1997

hairstyle.

In the first picture a Japanese and a Russian are portrayed as parties in a popular Japanese game *niramekko* — stare at each other until someone laughs. The eye of a happy Japanese is drawn in the form of the character *nichi* for Japan, while the eye of a crying Russia is made of the katakana *ro* for Russia.

At the next picture the same couple is playing the game *hōhachiken*, a kind of a tossing popular at that time, an analogue of contemporary *janken*. Meiji counterparts for scissors, paper and stone were a gun, a fox and a village headman. The gun kills the fox, but the fox may deceive the headman, while he may take the gun and kill the fox. The game was accompanied by some musical performance which is why the Russian assumes a dancing posture. The Japanese has shown the gun while the Russian has shown the fox and lost.

Nihon (Japan) is written with *hō* for “gun” in

the middle of the word, while the word *Rokoku* (Russia) includes characters “fox” and “hardships.”

The bottom picture is called *Staring Match during the Winter Confinement* [Fuyugomori-no niramiai]. The artist portrayed a Japanese soldier with a cannon as his nose, barbed wire as his mouth and with Hi-no maru flag replacing his eyes. “Well, well,” says the Japanese, “usually one who laughs loses the staring match, but this guy is about to cry.” The Russian soldier answers: “I am not able to stare till spring and will disappear until the snow melts away.” His difficult situation is symbolically represented at the picture with his mouth shut up by the Japanese flag and by white flags in place of his eyes. In reality, though, Port Arthur surrendered only two months later.

The Japanese also liked to represent Russians as ugly night ghosts who disappeared with the sun-rise, “sun-rise” being a usual metaphor for Japan. The Russian army was nick-named *hyakki yagyō*, literary, “hundred demons walking in the night,” but the character for *hyaku* (hundred) was replaced by “white” and *ya* (night) by its homonym “field” which turned the meaning into something like “the scandalous behaviour of the Russian army at the battle field.”³³⁾ The original expression is a borrowing from *Okagami*.

A genre of short comic stories known since the Edo period as *chaban* was also used widely in the pages of *Nipponchi*. One of them retold the readers how a Russian scout took a piece of white cloth and painted with blood Hi-no maru in hope that the Japanese would not recognize him. Unfortunately, he was not the only smart Russian guy to play this trick. In the darkness of the night he ran across another fellow with the same kind of a flag and they started tussling. Only when the moon showed up they realized that both of them were Russians, Petka and his friend from Byelorussia.

In confusion they say to each other:

- Because we both had Hi-no maru, we thought we were enemies and started fighting. Well, it is really dangerous this way.
- Please, do not tell anyone in our troops about this episode.
- OK, this is all between us.

They turn to spectators and ask:

- You guys, also do not tell anyone³⁴⁾

If one of the pictures above shaped the Liaodung peninsula as the Russian eagle, another one, called *The Violent Scene of Extermination of Port Arthur's Tiger* [Ryojunko taiji-no aragoto]³⁵⁾, represented the peninsula as a tiger to emphasise the strength of the enemy (Figure 9). The caption to this picture noted:

Russia boasts to be the strong tiger of the Far East. For ten years it has held Ryojunko [Port Arthur] in its arms, blocked its mouth [harbour] and held in check the back [approaches to the Liaodung peninsular]. Recently it came to be renamed *Rojinko* [a trap for Russians] who can move neither their arms nor feet. From this time on the violent tiger has had great difficulty fighting with our Watonai. This is a wonderful victory which occurs once in thousand years. Let us cry "Hurrah!" "Where are Russians?" "They are nowhere." People throughout the world applaude: "Well done, great country [Japan]!"



Figure 9. Violent Scene of Extermination of Port Arthur's Tiger
Nakashima Shunkō. Copyright: Yumani shobō 1997

The text and the picture are built on associations with Kabuki. The words “violent scene” (*aragoto*) in the title refer to the name of a special style of performance when the extraordinary strength of a fierce god or a warrior is expressed. Usually actors who perform in this style have a headband and a special make-up, both of which we also see here. Watonai is a hero from Chikamatsu Monzaemon drama *Kokusenya kassen* who was famous for his strength.³⁶⁾ In this picture Watonai symbolises Japan and holds a board with characters “great victory.” The last words in the caption, *Naritaya*, is a stage name for the famous actor Ichikawa Danjiro and his troupe and also means “Bravo!”

The picture *War Hardships of Buddhist Warriors* [Hōshi busha-no kusen]³⁷⁾ is a parody on representatives of four genres of fine art. The spheres of interest of these men of letters may be identified through their clothing, utensils and gadgets (Figure 10).

The one to the right is a master of the tea ceremony. He holds tongs, water spoons and a broom for cleaning ashes. A water jug is depicted on his Hi-no maru flag and his coat of arms has the form of a burner. Next to him we see an ikebana master. His kimono is decorated with scissors; he holds a bamboo vase for flowers as a gun and a saw is his sword. The haiku master, represented here, belongs to the Basho school. We see a huge banana leaf and the famous frog from Basho’s haiku on the front-side of his armour. The warrior on the left is a tray landscape master. Probably, he is represented here because the art of making tray landscapes deals with the construction of territories, while war of course, deals with the acquisition of territories.

What is interesting about the four warriors is that they all seem to be talking



Figure 10. War Hardships of Buddhist Warriors
Nakashima Shunkō. Copyright: Yumani shobō 1997

nonsense. This is suggested first of all by the name of the tea ceremony master. He is called “Musashibo Benkei.” Benkei was the famous retainer of Minamoto Yoshitsune. Many legendary accounts embellished his adventures, popularised his strength and loyalty to his master. However, the first two characters in his name here *mucha* or *musa* mean “to say nonsense.” On the one hand, the warriors seem to be looking at the battle field and thus describe the awful situation of the Russian army. On the other hand, though dressed like warriors, they complain that in war time they cannot pursue their artistic hobbies. Benkei’s words *koicha wa orarenu* may mean a complaint that he has no company for whom to make strong tea. The haiku master laments that now when everyone is at the war theatre, he cannot arrange regular monthly haiku meetings. The problem of the ikebana master is that all leaves have been mixed, while the tray landscape master has no students to teach. The cartoonist, by way of ridiculing these men of letters, wanted to say that the great war left no space for leisurely cultural pursuits.

Sometimes Russian and Japanese ways of joking at each other coincided. As demonstrated above, in *Nipponchi*’s stories such words as *kamaboko* and *kinton* stood for false reports of Russian military leaders about their achievements. In the same way Russian comic writers and cartoonists poking fun at the attempts of the Japanese army to take over Manchuria also claimed that the Japanese reports about their victories were nothing but *utka* — a Russian word which implies two meanings: “a false rumour” and “a duck.” In this regard Russian cartoonists depicted Admiral Togo or General Nogi letting “ducks” fly out over the Sea of Japan.

Conclusion

General theories on the origins of laughter claim that incongruity and reversion of values form the basis of the ludicrous.³⁸⁾ Here the incongruity the Japanese felt was the gap between the image of Russia as a strong country, and Russia’s inability to win the war. On the opposite, the Russians poked fun at pretensions of Japan, which was despised as a small and weak country, to acquire, through its war efforts, the status of the great power. So, in both cases there is incongruity between image and reality. According to some theories, laughter may also symbolise the life-giving power.³⁹⁾ From this viewpoint, Japanese cartoonists and comic writers used laughter to inspire the public with the belief in a great future of their country.

Russians often laughed at the Japanese by ridiculing their appearance or by using jokes with sexual undertones. An examination of “popular prints” demonstrates that Russians were supposed to come into a mirthful state of mind whenever they could denigrate their enemies by making some physical harm to their bodies. This way of mockery looks crude and primitive, the humour flat and gaudy, but it was well familiar to the common folks through the tradition of *lubok* painting and popular performances. Many jokes had associations with proverbs, sayings and other forms of folklore and derived from the image Russia had of itself since the defeat of the Tartars. All these jokes aimed to prove the superiority of the Russians which in turn made “popular prints” attractive to peasants and townsmen alike. More intelligent Russians, however, were rather sceptical of these kitschy and flashy pictures understanding well that they had no relation to the realities of war.⁴⁰⁾ However, when “larger-than-life Cossacks”

lost the war to the “small Japanese” it appeared that Russians had made fools of themselves.

The Russian way of ridiculing the Japanese, as seen through satirical magazines, newspaper cartoons or postcards, was also shaped by a pervasive *Orientalism* and ideas about the domination of white men over the Oriental women. Although in reality Russia never directly sought to colonize Japan, the inertia of imperialistic consciousness is obvious. The emergence of this consciousness goes back to the time of Peter the Great who started building the Russian empire with ambitious plans stretching as far as Persia. The imagination of Russians also entertained the idea of a “Golden Island” located somewhere in the Pacific to the east of China.

Contrary to the Russians, the Japanese did not like to poke fun at the physical body and preferred to debunk the will of Russians, their moral or intellectual characteristics. It may be suggested that although this emphasis on physical differences is typical to Western representations of the Japanese in general, in this case obsession with physical features is also related to the big size of Russia, and to the naive belief that the size of the country itself guaranteed the victory at war. The Japanese, living on a narrow territory of land squeezed inbetween the mountains, had to resort more to their wits in their struggle with nature for survival and this may have had an impact on their sense of the comic.

Authors of *Nipponchi* more than their Russian counterparts exhibited an interest in word play. Chinese characters opened opportunities for puns and double meanings the Russian language lacked. Various form of word play (*kakekotoba*, *kuchiai*) had long existed in Japan. However, by the time of the Russo-Japanese War, the population of the country *en masse* became literate enough to enjoy these linguistic tricks, and comic writers were well aware of this fact. Nearly all comic stories and pictures in *Nipponchi* have close associations with traditional literary or drama forms, from *Okagami* and *Kabuki* to *rakugo* and *chaban*. Laughter was simply channelled through these familiar means which served as indicators of the comic.

Banal images of huge Cossacks and smart sailors were useless in their attempts to inspire the Russian people for the war effort when in reality soldiers and sailors were denied the opportunity to fight for their motherland. Russian comic pictures of the war demonstrate how criticism of high ranking officials and indignation with their inaptitude gave birth to opposition to the tsarist regime. On the contrary, in Japan the successful war was favourable for the consolidation of the Japanese nation and this unity was supported, by no small means, by the comic pictures of various magazines. Whereas in Japan laughter became an important weapon for attacking the enemy and for the building of national unity, in Russia it became the weapon which divided society into two camps.

Though it is well known that soon after the war many Japanese intellectuals were much attracted by Russian literature and political ideas, the fact remains that the scornful nickname *roske* (literary: Russian fool) which appeared during the Russo-Japanese War symbolised an enduring negative attitude to Russia. In Russia stereotypical images of the Japanese created by the comic pictures penetrated deeply into the Russian mind and began to disappear only when the Japanese “economic miracle” made the country a model for imitation by Russian society.

Notes

- 1) For example, after the Soviet take over of the Kurile Islands in September 1945 Stalin proclaimed triumphantly: "For forty years, we the men of the older generation, have waited for this day. And now this day has come... We have won. From now on we can consider our country saved from the threat of Germany in the West and of Japan invasion in the East", cited in William F. Nimmo, *Japan and Russia. A Reevaluation in the Post-Soviet Era*, Westport, Conn., London: Greenwood Press, 1994, p. 28.
- 2) *Japan Examined. Perspectives on Modern Japanese History*, edited by Harry Wray and Hilary Conroy. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1983, pp. 150-157.
- 3) *The Russo-Japanese War in Cultural Perspective*, edited by David Wells and Sandra Wilson. Hampshire and London: Macmillan Press, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999, p. X.
- 4) See: Marguerite Wells. *Japanese Humour*, Hampshire and London: Macmillan Press, New York: St. Martin's Press: 1997; Joel R. Cohn, *Studies in the Comic Spirit in Modern Japanese Fiction*: Harvard University Asia Centre: Distributed by Harvard University Press, Harvard-Yenching Institute Monograph Series, 41, 1998.
- 5) Joel R. Cohn. Op. cit., p. 19.
- 6) *Revolution of 1905-1907 in Fine Arts. Part One. Petersburg*, edited by V. V. Shleev. Moscow Izobrazitelnoye Iskusstvo, 1977; *Part Two. Moscow and Russian Province* edited by S. N. Roshchupkin. Moscow: Izobrazitelnoye Iskusstvo, 1978.
- 7) For example, "Tsushima Syndrom", *Almanac 'Cytadel'*, 1997; V. Yu. Gribovski, V. P. Poznahirev. *Vice-Admiral Z.P.Rozhdestvenski St. Petersburg*: Cytadel, Galereya Print, 1999.
- 8) M. Ya. Chapkina. *Illustrated Post-cards. On the Centenary of Post-cards in Russia*. Moscow: Galart, 1993; V. P. Tretyakov. *Open Letters of the Silver Age*. Saint Petersburg: Slaviya, 2000.
- 9) On images of Japan in the West see: Jean-Pierre Lehmann. *The Image of Japan: From Feudal Isolation to World Power, 1850-1905*. London, Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1978; I. Littlewood. *The Idea of Japan. Western Images, Western Myths*, London: Secker and Warburg, 1996.
- 10) On Orientalist discourse on Japan see: R. H. Minear. "Orientalism and the Study of Japan", *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 39, No 3, 1980; P. L. Pham. "On the Edge of the Orient". *Japanese Studies Bulletin of Australia*. Vol. 19, No 2, September 1999.
- 11) Douglas Sladen, *Funny Things in Japan*. SPb: tovarishchestvo khudozhestvennoi pechati, 1904, p. 22.
- 12) Rotem Kowner, "Nicholas II and the Japanese Body: Images and Decision-Making on the Eve of the Russo-Japanese War". *The Psychohistory Review*, No 26, 1998.
- 13) On "popular prints" of the Russo-Japanese War see: Yulia Mikhailova, Images of Enemy and Self — "Popular Prints" of the Russo-Japanese War". *Acta Slavica Iaponica*, 1996, vol. XVI, pp. 30-53.
- 14) *Budilnik* — a satirical magazine with caricatures published from 1865 till 1917, first in St. Petersburg and from 1873 in Moscow. In the beginning the magazine had democratic orientation, criticised capitalist exploitation and reactionary policy of the government; it was often forbidden by censorship. Later *Budilnik* became more loyal to the government. Works of outstanding writers such as A. P. Chekhov, K. M. Stanyukovich, G. I. Uspenski were also published there.
- 15) *Strekoza* — a weekly magazine with caricatures published in St. Petersburg from 1875 till 1918. Its main readers were ordinary townspeople. From 1908 with the change of the title into *Satiricon* it became one of the best satirical magazines in Russia where many famous artists worked.
- 16) U. Sviridenko, "In the Laundry of the European Civilisation". *Budilnik*, 1904, No 10, frontcover.
- 17) "The 'Evils' of the Day", *Strekoza*, 1904, No 7, p. 2.
- 18) "Matchmaking of an Englishman to a Japanese Bride". *Strekoza*, 1904, No 31, pp. 8-9.
- 19) "Fantastic Dreams of Japan." *Strekoza*, 1904, No 16, pp. 8-9.
- 20) Though it is written on the back-side of the postcard that it was printed for the Community of Saint Evgeniya, none of the catalogues of the Community's postcards list it. Probably, because of its indicent character the postcard did not receive any circulation in Russia. Its artist is unknow, but in the bottom left corner there is a board, similar to those used in Kabuki theatre for advertising, with the word "jacoto" written on it. This may stand for the artist's pen-name.
- 21) Dante Alighieri, *Divine Comedy*, Song 21. Moscow: Nauka, 1967, p. 95.
- 22) Volter, *Izbrannoye*. Moscow: Terra-Knizhnyi klub, 1998, p. 81.
- 23) Antoine de Baecque, *La Caricature Revolutionnaire*. Presses Du CNRS, 1998.

- 24) *Notre siècle en caricature. 537 dessins satiriques choisis et présentés par Philippe Colombani.* Preface de Jean-Francois Chiappe. Edition ATLAS, Paris, 1981, p. 25.
- 25) Z.P. Rozhestvenski (1848–1909) — the commander of the Baltic Squadron which made the way from the Baltic Sea to the Far East with the purpose to rescue the defenders of Port Arthur, but was defeated completely in the Battle of Tsushima (27 May 1905).
- 26) High-ranking court official A.M.Bezobrazov, Great Duke Aleksandr Mikhailovich, Minister of Home Affairs V.K.Pleve and others organized a joint-stock company for the exploitation of natural resources in Korea and Manchuria and urged the tsar to buy shares. They influenced the decision-making in foreign policy, but most of their initiatives were adventurist in nature and brought harm to Russia.
- 27) Shimizu Isao. *Manga-no rekishi.* Tokyo: Iwanami shincho, 1991, pp. 80-81, 87.
- 28) Haga Toru, Shimizu Isao. *Nitiro sensōki-no manga. Kindai manga 4.* Chikuma shobō, 1985.
- 29) *Fōzoku gahō* (Customs in Pictures) was published from February 1889 till March 1917. It was founded by Azuma Kensaburo, a successful entrepreneur in lithograph business. The technique of lithographs was combined with colour prints and texts. The magazine aimed at fulfilling three tasks: examination of customs of the Edo period, recording new customs of Tokyo and familiarisation with local customs. It also carried information on wars, earthquakes, exhibitions, etc. However, sometimes its authors resorted too much to imagination, but not to facts. *Yamashita Shigetami Bunshū*, edited by By Yamashita Shigeichi. Tokyo: Seiabō, 1991, p. 18.
- 30) Nakashima Shunkō. “Okusan-no otebara”. *Fūzoku Gahō Zōkan, Nipponchi*, 1904, No 295; reprinted in *Fūzoku Gahō CD-Rom ban*, ed. by Ōgushi Natsumi, Yokoyama Yasuko, Tokyo: yumani Shobō, 1997.
- 31) Otei Kinsho, “Sensō-no ryōri”. *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12
- 32) Nakashima Shunkō, “Niramekura to hōhachiken”. *Fūzoku Gahō Zōkan, Nipponchi*, 1904, No 299, p. 299.
- 33) Nakashima Shunkō, “Hyakki yakō”, *Fūzoku Gahō Zōkan, Nipponchi*, 1904, No 297.
- 34) Otei Kinsho, “Chaban. Kyōgen”. *Fūzoku Gahō Zōkan. Nipponchi*, 1904, No 297, p. 22.
- 35) Nakashima Shunko, “Ryojunkō taiji-no aragoto”. *Fūzoku Gahō Zōkan. Nipponchi*, 1904, No 299.
- 36) Kokusunya was originally the name of a Chinese warrior who lived in the end of the Ming and the beginning of the Qin dynasty and fought for the restoration of the glory of the Ming court. Chikamatsu used him as a prototype for Watōnai, a hero of his drama.
- 37) Nakashima Shunko, “Hoshi busha-no kusen”. *Fūzoku Gahō Zōkan. Nipponchi*, 1904, No 299.
- 38) Henry Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic.* Macmillan, 1911; B. Ya. Propp. *Problems of the Comic and Laughter*, Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1976.
- 39) D.S.Likhachov, A. M. Panchenko, *‘The World of Laughter’ in Ancient Russia.* Moscow: Nauka, 1976.
- 40) A. Pasternak. *A Vanished Present*, cited in Barbara Heldt, “‘Japanese’ in Russian Literature”, in *A Hidden Fire. Russian and Japanese Cultural Encounters, 1868-1926*, edited by J. Thomas Rimer. Stanford University Press: Stanford, California and Woodrow Wilson Centre Press; Washington D. C., 1995, p. 174.